

Teen Talk

Commonly Asked Questions about Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs)

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What are the Symptoms of the Common STDs?

Chlamydia

- ☑ Genital discharge
- ☑ Burning when urinating
- ☑ Frequently no symptoms in both males and females.

Gonorrhea

- ☑ Discharge from the genital organs
- ☑ Burning or itching during urination
- ☑ Frequently no symptoms in both males and females.

Syphilis

- ☑ Painless sores on genitals (10 days to 3 months after infection)
- ☑ Rash (3-6 weeks after sores appear)

HIV/AIDS (human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immune deficiency syndrome)

- ☑ No symptoms may appear for years until symptoms of AIDS occur

HPV (human papillomavirus)

- ☑ Genital warts (sometimes warts are not visible)

Genital Herpes

- ☑ Itching, burning, or pain in the genital area
- ☑ Blisters or sores (sores heal but may re-appear)

If you experience any of these symptoms, go to a doctor or clinic as soon as possible!

The Basics

Q. What is an STD?

A. STD stands for "Sexually Transmitted Disease." These infections are passed from person to person during sexual activity (vaginal, oral, or anal intercourse). Some infections are curable, while others are not. It is estimated that more than 12 million new cases of STDs occur in the U.S. each year, approximately 3 million among teenagers.

Q. Who can get an STD?

A. Anyone who is sexually active.

Q. How do I know if I have an STD?

A. The only sure way to know is by having a medical exam and lab tests, since many STDs do not have any obvious symptoms.

Q. Do condoms protect you from getting an STD?

A. For sexually active people, the most effective strategy for preventing STDs and HIV/AIDS is to use a condom correctly each and every time they have sex.

Q. Who can I talk to?

A. A parent, teacher, school nurse, family doctor, clergyman or other responsible adult.

Common Myths

Myth: If I don't have symptoms, that means I don't have an STD.

FACT: You can be infected with an STD and not know it. The only sure way to know if you have an STD is by having a medical exam and lab tests.

Myth: HIV/AIDS is the only STD that can't be cured.

FACT: STDs caused by viruses—genital herpes, genital warts, and HIV/AIDS—*cannot* be cured, although some medications may reduce the severity and/or delay the appearance of symptoms.

STDs caused by bacteria (like chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis) can usually be cured with antibiotics. If they are not treated early, serious problems can develop.



Q. What are the consequences of STDs?

- ✓ **Gonorrhea and Chlamydia:** These STDs can cause serious health problems if not diagnosed and treated early:
 - **pelvic inflammatory disease (PID)** can damage fallopian tubes and make it difficult or impossible to have a baby (infertility)
 - **tubal pregnancy** (also called ectopic pregnancy) – a condition where the pregnancy grows in the fallopian tube rather than the uterus which requires immediate medical care.
- ✓ **HPV:** Infection with some types of HPV has been linked to cancer of the cervix.
- ✓ **Syphilis:** This STD can cause blindness, heart disease, mental illness, joint damage, and death, if not diagnosed and treated early.
- ✓ **HIV/AIDS:** People who develop AIDS have severely weakened immune systems, which can lead to infections and death. STDs increase the risk of getting and transmitting HIV/AIDS. There is no cure for AIDS at this time.

! Males who are infected with STDs can transmit the infection to their partners, who if pregnant, can transmit the infection to their babies.

Prevention

Q. How can I prevent an STD?

- A.** Abstinence from sexual activity (not having vaginal, anal, or oral intercourse) is the most effective way to prevent STDs. For sexually active people, the most effective strategy for preventing STDs and HIV/AIDS is to use a condom correctly each and every time they have sex.

Q. If I am taking birth control pills, can I still get an STD?

- A.** YES! Birth control pills only protect against pregnancy, not STDs. People who rely on birth control pills or hormonal injections or implants (Depo or Norplant) to prevent pregnancy should also use condoms to protect against STDs.

Q. What should I do if I think I have an STD?

- A.** If you think you have been exposed to an STD, you should go to a clinic or doctor as soon as possible to be tested and treated. Health departments, which diagnose and treat STDs, are located in almost every county and city. They provide confidential information and will help answer any questions you may have about STDs.



Where to get more information about STD prevention:

National STD Hotline

1-800-227-8922

World Wide Web Sites

Division of STD Prevention, CDC

<http://www.cdc.gov/nchstp/dstd/dstdp.html>

American Social Health Association

<http://sunsite.unc.edu/ASHA>

